

Here’s what you need to know about DEI



SHELLENE DRAKES-TULL
OPINION

This year’s Black History (or Black Futures) Month feels different.

There’s less celebration and more resilience. There are people in our communities who are dead set against DEI ... but they don’t know what DEI means. They are convincing themselves, and others, that it’s a bad thing.

Plainly, DEI means diversity, equity and inclusion. It means having a diverse group of people feel like they belong and are appreciated. The terminology was created because, under the guise of meritocracy, only white, straight, able-bodied men were allowed to succeed, relatively barrier-free, in our society.

Those people had privilege and — unlike what people who are opposed to DEI would tell you — privilege isn’t an insult. It’s a recognition that there are parts of your identity that aren’t stopping you from success. Acknowledging our privilege lets us see our blind spots because if I’m not a person with a physical disability, I may not understand the challenges of traversing the TTC in a wheelchair.

We all have privilege of some sort. I am a straight, average-sized, educated, Canadian-born person. None of those things have made my life more difficult. I am also a Black woman, which I love, but those identities made me have to work twice as hard to get half as far.

Some people believe that privilege means they didn’t work hard for their achievements. Well, that’s not true either. All we’re saying is that you didn’t have additional barriers to climb because of your race, gender, sexuality or ability.

Some people would happily scream I’m woke. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “woke” as “aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice).” I guess I am proudly woke if that means people with disabilities are accommodated, people of all races and genders are paid equally, and everyone is treated with respect regardless of what they look like, who they love, and whether they pray in a church or not at all.

I tell my children, you don’t have to agree with everyone, but you *do* have to respect everyone.

But for some people the thought of not being centred is the same as being oppressed.

Simply look at the shambles of the United States of America. The government’s resistance to DEI isn’t theoretical — it’s playing out in real time.

For the past three weeks — it feels like it’s been three years — U.S. President Donald Trump has been scribbling executive orders like the Post-it Notes reminders. He’s signed orders to end anti-Christian bias, ban trans athletes from women’s sports (just over one per cent of the U.S. population identifies as transgender), prepare a migrant detention centre at Guantanamo Bay, end birthright citizenship, freeze refugee admissions and so much more. He has also directed that all Diversity, Equity and Inclusion federal workers be put on paid leave, eventually planning to lay them off.

Trump’s reasoning? The White House fact sheet reads: “Individual dignity, hard work, and excellence are fundamental to American greatness. This Executive Order reaffirms these values by ending the Biden-Harris Administration’s anti-constitutional and deeply demeaning ‘equity’ mandates, terminating DEI, and protecting civil rights.”

That’s funny because before the American Civil Rights Act of 1964 employers could decide to not hire people because of their race, gender, sexuality religion and more. If meritocracy worked so well, people wouldn’t have had to fight and die for equal rights — for diversity, equity, inclusion and justice.

Let’s come back to Canada. We have elections coming up and, unlike many of the past, voting will make a dramatic difference in our lives. While the U.S. takes steps backward, we in Canada have a choice ahead of us: work together to build an imperfect but wonderful Canada or allow hate to divide us.

No one should be against inclusion or equity or belonging or justice. If you are, do some soul-searching and figure out what your problem really is, because it surely isn’t DEI.

Stay woke.

SHELLENE DRAKES-TULL IS A TORONTO-BASED STORYTELLER, EDUCATOR AND THE FOUNDER OF SWEET LIME COMMUNICATIONS.



ANNA MONEYMAKER TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

For the last three weeks, U.S. President Donald Trump has been scribbling executive orders like the Post-it Notes reminders, writes Shellene Drakes-Tull.



THOMAS FROESE PHOTO

An advertisement in Lisbon for the play “Love Supreme.” Commenting on relationships and recent American threats on Canada, Thomas Froese writes, “Now our love seems supremely soured.”

What’s Canada to you now?



THOMAS FROESE
OPINION

Dear America,
I’m in Lisbon, returning to Canada, thinking of you. Thinking about relationships. About Valentine’s Day. Family Day. Thinking about your threats, of course.

“Crazy times,” a young Portuguese man said to me when learning I’m Canadian. Even prior, in Uganda — Uganda! — people looked at me with sad eyes, shaking their heads. Everyone knows.

I realize there’s no such thing as security. Not really. Not in this world. But tell me. Tell us. What’s Canada to you now?

Friends with economic benefits? Your frenemy? Your ex? Your annex? Your 30-day pause? Do you even know?

Sure we’ve had moments. That little disagreement in 1812. Some salvos fired. A few buildings burned. Some hockey game fights since then. Even good relationships have squabbles.

But haven’t our family-like ties been everyone’s envy? The world’s longest border with all those sweet goods traded back and forth, back and forth, day after night, year after year, flowing like wine, really, like love supreme.

“A Love Supreme” is a stage-play here in Lisbon. Now our love seems supremely soured. You say you’re just Canada’s sugar daddy. Canada can’t make it without you. Really?

Yet you want our precious resources? Oh America. My dear United States of Advertising. It feels so cheap now.

Of course, it’s about Donald. Some of you have fallen horribly hard for him and aren’t sounding anything like yourselves. Donald, trying to lay everyone bare, like we’re all standing naked under fluorescent lights. Which, thinking of Donald, isn’t an image you want to keep for long.

But when you’re laid bare, you dig deep. You find what’s true, the difference between infatuation and the real deal. Here’s infatuation. Break into a church basement window to find a girl’s address. Find her house. Ring that doorbell. I did all this once. And who answered? Her boyfriend. Imagine.

Years later, hours away, I had a small basement apartment. The homeowners invited me up any time. Use the inside stairs, they said. One day I did. Did I need salt? So I knocked on that door. And who’s there to my dismay? Who’s the son in that family? Mister Boyfriend from earlier. Come on. What are the odds? Was the entire universe conspiring against me?

It seems things happen so we can grow, even grow up, especially when we don’t get what we want, or what we think we want. Much later I met my bride. Got engaged on Valentine’s Day. It was all larger than my own efforts. There was a wind, a mystery, behind it. It was a different sort of doorway.

In our early marriage we’d lay on the floor of our ground-level flat in, of all places, Sana’a, in Yemen,

watching that little TV, watching Monday Night Football on Tuesday nights. We also watched you march into nearby Iraq. “Come home,” my father said repeatedly. “Come home.” But I was home. That’s the thing about the real deal. It gives you peace.

The deal with Donald, the emperor without clothes, is different. It involves infatuation and confusion, both.

By the way, 23 years ago today, Feb. 15, 2002, some 600 cities protested that Iraq invasion. Washington fed you lies then, too. You got Saddam. And, naturally, the oil money. About 4,500 Americans died. And Iraqis? Some estimates surpass 500,000 dead. Children. Women. Men. Let that sink in, what the human family can do to one another. This is the lust of empirical power.

While here I’ve learned something about Lisbon’s history and suffering. A 1775 earthquake off the Atlantic coast levelled this city. Then the tsunami. Then city-wide fires. Then disease. More than 30,000 Portuguese died. Then the long rebuild.

But Lisbon is now a different place. The human spirit — and here I’ll suggest, whatever may happen, the Canadian spirit — is resilient. People can recover from losses, even from earthquakes. Nobody in their right mind ever asks for such. But they can be made better people for it.

THOMAS FROESE WRITES ABOUT NEWS, TRAVEL AND LIFE. FIND HIM AT THOMASFROESE.COM AND THOMASFROESE.SUBSTACK.COM.

Social assistance rates must rise

SUSAN MUMA

It is rare to read the Hamilton Spectator these days without seeing an article or letter about poverty and homelessness in our city.

In fact, on the weekend of Jan. 11, several news sites shocked us with the story that more than 80,000 (81,515 to be exact) people experienced homelessness in Ontario in 2024.

Our city is doing its best — adding shelter beds, bringing in housing for the homeless, preparing a place for this housing complete with separate showers, washrooms and kitchens and hiring Good Shepherd to provide wraparound care. But no matter how much the city tries to fix the problem, it cannot do so alone.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario is advocating for an \$11-billion investment in affordable housing and \$2 billion over eight years to ensure those in encampments are properly housed.

In her Dec. 5 report to a Hamilton City Council committee, titled “Indecent Social Assistance in Hamilton and Ontario,” Sara Mayo of Hamilton’s Social Planning and Research Council identified a critical reason for the homelessness and poverty we are experiencing social

assistance rates are too low!

The following are a few of the salient facts explaining the current situation facing 80,000 plus Ontario residents:

- Social Assistance Rates for Ontario Works recipients have been frozen at \$733 in Ontario since 2018. Those who are homeless lose \$390, the shelter portion of that \$733 leaving them with \$345 a month to survive. Those on the Ontario Disability Support Program are luckier; their income was adjusted to inflation in 2022 and now stands at \$1,368.

- Canada sets measures for poverty in our country. The measure for “deep poverty” in Canada in 2023 was \$1,558 (adjusted for inflation) per month. It is set at 70 per cent of the Market Basket Measure, Canada’s official poverty line. Therefore, singles on OW, with their monthly incomes frozen at \$733, struggle to live on an income which is \$825 below the \$1,558 level for deep poverty. Even the \$1,368 received by ODSP recipients leaves those disabled people living in deep poverty.

Two other levels of poverty are used to measure the depth of poverty in Canada. The Market Basket Measure Poverty Line is Canada’s official poverty line. It was set at \$2,226 in 2023. The Low Income

Measure, adjusted to inflation in 2022 was \$2,561, an income level which excludes those living at the level from actively participating in society.

Average incomes for others in Hamilton include \$2,975 (minimum wage), \$3,467 (living wage in 2023). In 2021 the average monthly income in Hamilton was \$4,870. When considering the figures above, it is easy to see how impossible it is to live any kind of life on social assistance.

We all realize the cost of living has skyrocketed since the pandemic. The average cost of an apartment in Hamilton is \$1,017. How can \$733 pay for that?

Our premier tells us these OW recipients should get jobs. How? A job seeker must have an address, a phone and dress presentably.

Once again, our premier tells us OW case managers will help clients find work. How? The average case-load per worker in Hamilton is 135. He tells us OW is only temporary. Yet 23 per cent of Hamilton recipients have been there for more than five years.

If we are serious about solving our homelessness crisis, we must begin by doubling social assistance rates. As things stand now, rates for OW and ODSP make it impossible for recipients to escape poverty and to live a life that allows for some dignity and any ability to participate in society. Anything less than doubling the rates is just government mandated poverty.

SUSAN MUMA IS A MEMBER OF THE HAMILTON SOCIAL WORK ACTION COMMITTEE.